

Incognito

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Satsuki writes anonymous stories to deal with her troubled past.

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Chapter 1

She submerged herself completely, watching bubbles break from her nose for the surface, but no matter how long she bathed she was still a punctured oil drum, seeping corruption into the clear, warm water. She could stay here for a hundred years, and it would still be insufficient to expunge the filth from the core of her being.

Satsuki re-read the last two lines of "*Im Badehaus*", checked her spelling, and then clicked "Post", feeling the weight lift from her shoulders, twice over this time: once for the completion of the work, as was always the case, and once more that she had finally written *that* story. "Get it off your chest" was the English idiom, and that was exactly how it felt, like a weight of basalt had been lifted from her, that she'd been released from some medieval punishment.

Flicking back to her dashboard, she waited to see what the response would be, tapping the base of the chair with her foot - the nervous tic she'd developed when she'd started writing and which she was now, unsuccessfully, trying to suppress.

makoconuts liked your post

makoconuts reblogged your post and added: "3m just posted a new fic! xcited! scared to read it too!"

makoconuts . It hadn't taken long to work out who that was, even if some of the other posts, and particularly pictures, she liked and reblogged were surprising at best and positively eye-watering at worst. Satsuki wondered whether Mako had the faintest inkling that the person she sometimes sat next to at lunch, and to whom she was teaching her mother's secret recipe for croquettes, was the same *merriemonthofmay* whose writing she followed so assiduously.

Then other updates followed, notifications flowing up from the base of the screen in a waterfall of commentary.

“should I read it?”

“I’m going to read it. Wish me luck :-)”

“tw child abuse, tw incest, wtf?? is this a good idea?”

She’d tagged it as thoroughly as she could, but even so worry gnawed at her. What if her writing awoke memories for someone else? Someone who’d successfully put their past behind them in a way that she hadn’t been able to? Wasn’t that just selfish of her? For a moment she entertained the idea of just deleting it, but that would have felt like murdering her child, or maybe even erasing herself, and now it was anyway too late:

“FUCK”

“I’m crying”

“Thank you merriemonthofmay. But I think I need to be alone for a while now.”

“FUCK!! FUCCK!!! HOW COULD SOMEONE DO THAT TO HER OWN DAUGHTER!! I’M SO FUCKING FUCK!!!!!!”

She would never have believed it before, but she’d come to realize that writing was like swinging a sword around blindfold. You might think you had mastery of the technique, but you could never be sure that someone wasn’t standing in the path of the blade. There was just the hope that she wasn’t adding any more casualties to the ledger against her.

“do you think 3m is ok? i mean, you couldn’t write like that without knowing about it, could you?”

“i don’t know... they never have their ask open...”

“hey if you’re reading this and you need to talk...”

The messages continued. Outrage. Sadness. Some abuse, as there sometimes was, but quickly shouted down. And line after line of anonymous well-wishing - people she'd never met, never would meet, thanking her and hoping that she was OK. But not the name she was looking for. Until:

lyingfromyou liked your post

Satsuki had been aware of them for a few months now; whoever they were they'd been active long before she began to put her thoughts down. And unlike her own works, which tended to the sombre irrespective of the source material, *lyingfromyou* wrote in a broad canon: humor, some jokes of which sailed effortlessly over Satsuki's head, smut (which still made her blush), and serious, melancholy works too. But always, it seemed, from the heart; always from the heart. And that awareness had been the extent of it, like listening to a class on literature from the corridor while you waited for your own lecture to begin, until one day something she'd written had been noticed:

lyingfromyou reblogged your post and added "PMMM: Their Last Wish, Unfulfilled - read this! rly good!"

There'd been comments in the tags too, like a note passed between classmates inside a text book:

#u made homura and madoka sisters in the end #thats a bit fuckd up tho

So she'd responded in kind:

#It seemed the saddest possible outcome

The conversation continued like that, over weeks, over works, messaging in the metadata. Their last exchange had been over *lyingfromyou*'s most recent story - a short piece about a girl who lost her best friend in a fire. That had hit Satsuki particularly hard, though she struggled to understand why, and she'd been forced to sneak

out of the house for some space, avoiding Ryuko, who'd been bashing away on things unknown in her room. She'd walked all the way through the gardens, to the wild wooded areas beyond where the gardeners maintained order, and sat on a fallen tree trunk by the stream and re-read it on her phone. Away from any chance of observation, she'd let herself cry properly for the first time since she'd been a small child - perhaps the first time ever - and then she'd washed her face back to normality in the cold waters of the stream, heedless of the weeds it put on her shirt, and she'd known what she needed to write next.

***lyingfromyou** reblogged your post*

#u ok bro?

#I'm fine - thank you

#u want 2 talk?

#It's not necessary #I only needed to write something

*#think i know u better now #i know someone who'd understand u
#they'd kill me if they knew i was talking about them :-)*

#Everyone has been very kind

#i'd like to know u better still #could that happen?

#I'm sorry this is as much of me as I can share

#could i be ur friend?

#You already are my friend

A minute passed, then two, then:

#thx... #write something cheerful next time #ur killing us here :-)

#I will try #It doesn't come very naturally to me

Satsuki closed the browser and looked at the new document; above her she could hear Ryuko thumping down the stairs towards the library. She canted the screen towards herself slightly, masking what she was doing, as her sister entered; Ryuko slumped in the weathered leather couch, tossing her well-travelled laptop - the one that was almost mummified beneath Linkin Park tour stickers - into the opposite corner. Her eyes were puffy and red, and though the light in the room was grey, moist tracks were still visible running down her cheeks.

“Girl troubles?” It was as challenging as always, but Satsuki tried her best to find the right question for an unfamiliar situation.

“Nah. Not really. Not today.” Ryuko lay back, rubbing the heels of her palms in her eyes and then brushing aside the crimson fringe. She looked at where Satsuki’s sleek business laptop was still open on the desk. “You working on something, Sis? Not interrupting am I?”

Satsuki looked down at the screen. There was only a title so far: “*A Precious Curve of Red*” .

“It’s nothing important.”

She fully closed the lid, enjoying the click as the magnets took hold. It could wait for another time.
